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Delivering insights across the organization: Creating a Hybrid Data Analytics Approach with Qlik Cloud

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Being the best in business requires a dedication to constant improvement. It means being willing to find a way to make decisions smarter and faster than any opponents. Agility in the face of changing conditions is also important, but you need a way to find and analyze the trends responsible for the changes. For United Safety and Survivability Corporation, being the best in class required creating an analytics department.

[United Safety](#) was founded in 1984 with a dream of making products to enhance the safety of mass transportation. Our focus is on increased survivability whenever potentially life-threatening incidents happen. Our active air purification systems screen out many forms of pollution and dangerous microbes. Fogmaker solutions offer effective fire suppression in enclosed areas such as engine compartments. We also offer passenger safety tools, like mass transit seats and vehicle locks. Through that intense dedication to protecting lives, today United Safety offers a wide variety of products across several different industries.

Move away from Excel spreadsheets. Instead, use a platform that is more scalable and easier to maintain.

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As forward-thinking as we are, we found ourselves behind the times when it came to our analytics capabilities. Given the vast improvements to software tools related to business intelligence (BI), we wanted to move away from Excel spreadsheets. We needed a platform that was more scalable and easier to maintain. The responsibility for analytics also needed to rest in the hands of the actual users.

When I joined United Safety in 2020, I was charged with the task of leading the analytics unit. The company leadership wanted to transform the organization into one that prioritized data and used data insights to make better decisions.

From Driving Data to Being Data-Driven

United Safety wasn't new to data analysis. In fact, the organization held licenses for Power BI. Several of our analysts were quite comfortable with the platform and had already created many reports and models.

Although Power BI is a wonderful tool for beginning an analytics journey, it did not address certain needs necessary for growth. For example, the platform placed a lot of emphasis on the end user for everything. That meant users who were competent with data analysis and coding could do great things. However, everyone else in the organization found it difficult to gain insights.

In addition, there was no centralized data control. Users had to create definitions based on the source data. Since individuals often worked alone or in small groups, each one might create different definitions for common terms like "revenue" or "sales." Most apps were created from scratch or adapted from a random model, and people never knew how much they could trust a particular interpretation.

An organization can't become #datadriven until there's a centralized team to create governance and structure around the data.

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I knew that United Safety would never truly become data driven until we had a centralized team to create governance and structure around the data. People needed confidence in that structure to understand and trust the data. We also needed a platform that could allow seamless delivery in an easily digested format. Based on my previous experience, I knew it was time to look at [Qlik Cloud](#).

There were many reasons why I thought the Qlik Cloud platform could take us to the next level, but there were three main benefits. First, Qlik Sense is designed to foster easy use and powerful visualizations. With previous platforms, developers spent way too much time behind the scenes to create a usable product. That was time that could have been spent analyzing the data itself.

Second, Qlik data files (QVDs) allow users to make significant connections between different data pools. For example, it was possible to create a financial QVD and a sales QVD and easily combine the two to find insights. This was incredibly important because using data effectively often means comparing data pools in new and unique ways. If connecting data is difficult, then it interferes with the search for new paths of thought.

The third advantage of Qlik Sense is its [Associative Engine](#). This ability to quickly explore potential correlations between separate data pools is a powerful way to discover new insights. After all, there would be no journey if we already knew where to find interesting relationships. The engine makes it possible to uncover connections that previously would have been buried under mountains of data.

Centralizing Governance to Create User Freedom

One of the most interesting challenges about becoming a data-driven organization is finding the balance between control and freedom. On one hand, keeping all the control in one place creates bottlenecks and makes the users feel disconnected from the process. On the other hand, giving users too much liberty can lead to inconsistent dashboard formats and unreliable

interpretations. Like most things in life, the key is finding a way to walk the fine line between the two.

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At United Safety, we created a hybrid analytics model that provides the best of both worlds. We started by creating a stand-alone analytics department. Although there are many organizations that still choose to house analytics under the IT umbrella, we felt it was especially important to create a unit that was solely dedicated to data. Whenever the two functions converge, there is always the potential to prioritize IT duties. That could mean analytics becomes yet another task, instead of a consistently powerful resource to the business.

By establishing a focused analytical unit, we ensured that the governance structure could maximize the potential of data. Most importantly, we placed controls to make sure that there was a single source of reliable truth for every user. That way, no one user can begin to degrade confidence by producing a model based on an unsound data interpretation.

We also established controls to make it easier for new users to utilize dashboards created by other units. For example, we standardized colors so that key items are always the same color. Revenue will always be blue, for example, and budgets are always green. That makes it possible for anyone in the organization to use the dashboards produced without relearning an individual's unique development process.

Integrating Qlik Cloud into Our Software and Culture

New software platforms are only useful if they can be integrated into existing platforms and processes. I am happy to say that it was fairly easy to connect Qlik with our other solutions. Part of our analytics updating process involved moving to a cloud-based data warehouse and Microsoft Azure. We have data from all of our applications including our ERP, Salesforce, HR systems, and engineering applications, all flowing into Azure, then QVD files are developed and accessed through Qlik Cloud. That helped us to greatly streamline the flow of data and avoid duplications and miscommunications.

We also found great success integrating Qlik into Salesforce. Obviously, our sales teams spend much of their time using Salesforce, so asking them to leave the platform to access other data is a barrier to adoption. Embedding Qlik in Salesforce creates a seamless experience that makes the data a valuable resource instead of a new task.

Qlik Alerting Saves on Inventory Costs

It's too early to see the full ROI of our new hybrid approach, but we have had great success integrating Qlik Sense into our people processes. Inventory and warehouse management staff have already noticed the benefits.

Like most manufacturing shops, a lot of what we do depends on having the right parts at the right time. Beginning a job with certain parts missing can cost us money and time. We also miss certain opportunities if we can't access various parts in a timely manner.

In the past, a member of our warehouse staff had to go into the ERP, remember the location of the query they needed, run the query, and understand the impact of the results. We have since built a simple app that leverages the same information and layered [Qlik Intelligent Data Alerts](#) on top of it. Now, we get an automatic alert whenever parts meet a certain threshold. This has already resulted in inventory cost savings.

As a result of this success, we've started talking with our management about other ways that Qlik Sense Enterprise SaaS can improve our inventory management. Our production floor has also been examining the potential for using heat mapping to discover bottlenecks and opportunities for increased efficiency.

These and other successes are only possible with support from leadership. While many organizations claim they want to be data-driven, they are not willing to put resources behind that desire. United Safety leadership blazed a path for our success by supporting the move to Qlik Cloud and growing the analytics team.

With commitment from top leadership and a powerful new BI tool at our disposal, the analytics department is charting a new course at United Safety.

About Qlik

Qlik's vision is a data-literate world, where everyone can use data and analytics to improve decision-making and solve their most challenging problems. Qlik provides an end-to-end, real-time data integration and analytics cloud platform to close the gaps between data, insights and action. By transforming data into active intelligence, businesses can drive better decisions, improve revenue and profitability, and optimize customer relationships. Qlik does business in more than 100 countries and serves over 50,000 customers around the world. [Qlik.com](https://www.qlik.com)